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ABSTRACT

The Office of Instructional Resources of the University of Illinois-Urbana/Champaign is described in relation to the suprasystem encompassing the state legislature, the board of trustees, parent and alumni groups, and state and federal agencies. The system consists of campus administration, colleges, academic departments, research units, and other campus agencies; the subsystem, which is the Course Development Division; and a campus newsletter devoted to student evaluations of many courses on campus. The office combined two agencies already active on campus, namely the Office of Instructional Television and the Office of Institutional Research. The overall purpose of the office was a concern for the improvement of the instructional program, particularly at the undergraduate level, to assist the faculty in their awareness of the increased use of newer techniques and media, and through studies of the influence on academic achievement of other factors in the university environment within and outside the classroom. (MJM)

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INSTRUCTIONAL DEVELOPMENT: POLITICS AND HIERARCHIES*

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A decade ago the Office of Instructional Resources was created by combining two agencies already active on campus. One was the Office of Instructional Television which was the outgrowth of the designs by some to have television solve the problems of mass education, and the other was the Office of Instructional Research which was broadly engaged in research efforts related to higher education. Let me quote from the enabling act passed by the Board of Trustees on June 17, 1964:

> The Executive Vice-President and Provost recommends that an Office of Instructional Resources be established to replace the Office of Instructional Research and the Office of Instructional Television at the Urbana-Champaign campus . . . .
>
> The Office of Instructional Resources will be broadly concerned with the improvement of the instructional program—especially at the undergraduate level—to assisting the faculty in the increased use of newer techniques and media and through studies of the influence upon academic achievement of other factors in the University environment within and outside the classroom.
>
> The need to improve the quality of collegiate instruction in the face of mounting enrollment, . . . makes it imperative to use as fully and as effectively as possible the newer instructional resources such as television, programmed instruction, films, graphic presentations and other audiovisual techniques. The Office of Instructional Resources will assist faculty members in the use of these media and in evaluating their effectiveness.

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Shortly after that beginning, a new division, the Instructional Materials Division, which dealt with the full range of audiovisual material was added to the Office. A Programmed Instruction Division was added at about the same time when that panacea was having its hey-day. The latter division was dismantled two years later when its head accepted another position.

It was the Fall of 1967 when the present Course Development Division of the Office began its operations. Rather than representing a single mode of developmental activity or a single solution for instructional problems, the Course Development Division was pragmatically organized to explore a variety of ways to involve more faculty more actively in the instructional development process. The rationale and operating premises for the Division were spelled out in a recent Annual Report:

> The Course Development Division has as its goal the development and improvement of instruction through the application of principles and theories from education and other social sciences to instructional problems. It seeks a systematic way of evaluating faculty-generated instructional problems in terms of their usefulness to the faculty in bringing about more satisfying and effective instruction. Activities typically begin when an instructor or department has an instructional problem which lends itself to evaluation and development. Activities include consultation with individuals interested in revising course content or teaching methods, analyzing and planning for the improved instructional use of teaching assistants, faculty, or instructional resources, and developing evaluation programs related to the instructional process.

Instructional development is by nature cooperative work—helping people or departments develop their own methods to eleviate instructional problems, rather than prescribing solutions or recipes for success. To encourage departments and individual faculty members to attend more closely to their instructional responsibility is a slow process that as often as not involves many minute increments of insights rather than one that begins with a major "project." Nevertheless, once initiated, over time major restructuring of courses has occurred.

These official statements and the sketch of the beginnings of the Course Development Division seem to be necessary to an analysis of system-attributes that have made the Office of Instructional Resources and the

Course Development Division a viable and healthy subsystem operating on a large (approximately 42,000 students) campus. But no subsystem operates in a vacuum unless the system of which it is part is itself operating in an unchanging environment. Few members of the higher education community would suggest that our environment is unchanging.

The Suprasystem

The suprasystem consists of the people of the State of Illinois, especially as their voice is heard through the State Legislature and the Board of Trustees, other institutions in the academic procession, parents and alumni groups, and state and federal agencies of government. The contextual variables that find their roots with elements in the suprasystem are to some degree interactive with expectations promoted by the system itself or by related educational systems. Since dollars are what makes the wheels go round and since the suprasystem represents a source of dollars it should not be surprising that variables affected by outside groups should find their translation in activities on campus. But the expectations of members in the suprasystem are sometimes generated by the system itself. The whole media movement is one such example. Spurred on partly by enthusiastic groups within the system, expectations were raised and money supplied to allow huge investments of human and hardware resources that have affected the operation of subsystems such as the Course Development Division. What might be termed the "accountability press" operating at the present time is an example of a variable that is now having its impact on how development agencies carry out and promote their activities.

The System

For our purposes the system is the campus. It consists of campus administration, colleges, academic departments, research units, and other campus agencies. The system, interpreting and reacting to varying pressures from the suprasystem as well as the subsystems within, affects the operation of each of the subgroups through the allocation of resources and the granting or withholding of status and prestige.

The Subsystem

The Course Development Division is a subsystem. It both affects and is affected by variables present within the suprasystem and the system. When variables within the environment press for the University of Illinois to attend to its teaching responsibilities, the Course Development Division is a visible sign of that attention. In other years when students have been more aggressive about curricular changes, the Course Development Division provided an organizational focal point for efforts to alleviate that situation. In other words, Course Development is an adaptive subsystem. The structure within which it operates seldom changes, but its goals can be considered to be constantly subject to negotiation as they are influenced by outside and internal considerations. The more specific objectives are even shorter-ranged and tend to grow out of the day-to-day activities that are going on at any given time. The Course Development Division is a responsive subsystem. I do not apologize for its lack of objectives. The general purpose related to the development and improvement of instruction on our campus provides sufficient operating guidelines to direct and constrain our activities. It isn't that the Division lacks a point of view; rather it is that the articulation of that point of view depends on the nature of the contextual variables, which are constantly shifting. The Course Development Division has no coercive power faculty or departments nor does it seek such power. Recipes for resolving instructional problems are non-existent. The nature of the development activities are dependent on the nature of the problem. Let me cite two examples—one that led from an evaluation activity to a number of developmental activities and the other that led from a development activity toward a broad evaluation effort and expanding curricular development possibilities.

The "Advisor"

About five years ago students on our campus began publishing the Advisor, a summary of student evaluations of many courses on campus. It was roundly criticized by many groups on campus for perceived inaccuracies in the editing and for other reasons which partly reflected the resistance of many faculty to publish evaluations of instruction. Because some of the students involved in its publication were viewed as problem-causing

activists, there was reluctance to cooperate with the students to improve their efforts. However, the Advisor was seen by some as a vehicle to increase the attention given to teaching on campus, as a way to create a need among faculty who might not otherwise be persuaded to attend to students who some believed had a legitimate "right-to-know," and as a way to reward faculty who were highly rated by their students. Consequently, cooperative arrangements were established between the Course Development Division, the Measurement and Research Division, and the students to continue and improve their work. While it is difficult to point to specific development projects which occurred because the Advisor was published, it is interesting to speculate on some of the spin-offs that are partially attributable to its production.

1. The results of public evaluation of teaching by students led to increased demand for the traditional services of Course Development as faculty seek to improve their courses and teaching.

2. The demand for the development of student evaluation forms has increased substantially as departments seek evaluation forms tailored to their particular types of courses and styles of teaching.

3. The increase in the use of student evaluation has led to an increased interest for the development of systems for faculty evaluation for pay and promotion purposes that include input from other sources than students.

To some degree these spin-offs are the result of a decision made to work with the students and help them improve their evaluation techniques. The decision was made politically—with its risks and potential for pay-off. Not all of the spin-offs were anticipated at the time work with the students began. How is it possible to be pre-ordinate about specific goals of a subsystem when we have no crystal ball? It seems better to have overall guiding goals for development efforts and adapt objectives to the opportunities that become available.

The "390" Project

Educational Psychology 390 is the beginning measurement course in our department. Two years ago a dissatisfied graduate student in the course approached me with a proposal to develop supplementary material to assist students in the course. The Course Development Division decided to support and supervise the development of the materials even though we recognized there were problems: we couldn't tell if our investment in time and effort would pay off in terms of institutionalization of the results, and the initiation for the project came from a student rather than from the demand of faculty, which didn't auger well for its success. As a first order of business we attempted to make this more than a project initiated by the Course Development Division. We needed to create a demand for our services among faculty. One way to get the attention of faculty is to ask for money and the result of our negotiations was that the development costs were split.

Several hundred pages of supplementary materials have been produced and well received by students, along with diagnostic entry tests, a set of laboratory experiences, and a set of overhead projection cells. The spin-offs have been most interesting. The Measurement Division of the Educational Psychology Department has attended to the curricular problems related to that course more diligently than ever. They have now approved the idea of a proficiency test for the course, with the implication that all who teach the course will have to consider what concepts should be included. The administration has made subtle noises about the 19 other beginning statistics courses presently being taught on campus dealing with essentially the same material and wondering about the problem of redundancy and how to deal with it. Several instructors are considering whether or not the course is even satisfactory in its present format. More concentrated evaluation of teaching has taken place in this course than ever before.

The two graduate student developers will each teach a section of the course next semester under the supervision of a faculty member interested in further developing the self-paced aspects. This list of

side effects is up to date as of the present, but how does one anticipate what other doors will be opened because of the efforts in this course?

The overriding goal of course development is to discover and implement those activities and strategies that lead to improved instruction as defined by faculty, educators, and administrators. But beyond that very general statement, goals are not considered to be predetermined. Rather they are thought to be constantly changing in response to environmental variables. Instructional development is process oriented rather than product oriented, although products are often the intended and actual result. Developers must work both sides of the street—or both upstairs and downstairs, if you are hierarchically oriented. Development must be a credible activity to those who control its destiny as well as to its clients or risk losing its support upstairs and its projects downstairs.